

The Mandolin

St. Francis Catholic High School

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"Spread the word."

Issue 130



"THE PERFECT WAY TO CATCH UP ON SCHOOL NEWS, WORLD NEWS, AND FUN REVIEWS!"

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Model United Nations Takes on Stanford

BY ANNE SCHICK '26

This month, students from our Model United Nations team (MUN) took a trip to the Stanford MUN Conference, a three-day event that brought together high school delegates from across the globe to tackle critical international issues. Through committee sessions, engaging debates, and drafting resolutions, the delegates worked collaboratively to address challenges ranging from climate change to censorship and humanitarian crises. The conference showcased the members' public speaking, negotiation, and critical thinking skills in a highly competitive environment.

The St. Francis delegation achieved remarkable success, earning awards across various committees. Bela Deol ('25) and Stephanie Olvido ('25) were recognized with Honorable Mentions in the UNHCR: Nigeria committee for their contributions to discussions on refugee issues. Lauren Thomas ('25) also received an Honorable Mention for her performance in the Athenian Assembly, while Caitlyn Richwine ('25) earned a Verbal Commendation for her role in the Hong Kong 2020 committee.

Grace Jurrens ('25) stood out in the JCC Russia: Mikhail Bakunin committee, winning the Outstanding Delegate award for her exceptional leadership and debate skills. The delegation's top honor went to Juliet Shah ('26), who was awarded Best Delegate in the Ad-Hoc: Uri Geller committee, an award given only to the highest-performing delegate in each group.

The weekend-long conference ended on an uplifting note with the much-anticipated "Fun MUN", a cherished tradition where delegates celebrated their efforts through activities like karaoke, caroling to other committees and team games. Beyond tackling real-world issues, the conference provided a unique opportunity to form lasting friendships and create unforgettable memories. The remarkable success of our school's delegation highlighted their dedication, teamwork and leadership, leaving a lasting impression on both the conference and their fellow delegates. The Stanford conference was filled with learning, growth, camaraderie, and most of all, Troubie pride.

Christmas Activities in Sacramento

BY GEORGI WILLIAMS '28

Have a holly jolly Christmas! Christmas time is filled with laughter and fun – or *should* be filled with laughter and fun. The sad thing is, not many people know about some of the most entertaining and spirit-filled events in Sacramento that make the holiday season all the more jolly. I'd like to talk about some of the known – and lesser known holiday events for you, your friends, and your family to explore.

Imaginarium

The millions of lights and eccentric entertainment at the Imaginarium in Cal Expo is certainly a sight to behold. The Imaginarium is a great place to experience with family and friends with immersive activities and new entertainment. The Imaginarium is definitely the place to be during the holiday season.

Christmas Activities con't.

The Nutcracker

The Sacramento Ballet company puts on an annual performance of *The Nutcracker* at the SAFE Credit Union Performing Arts Center that is definitely worth the watch. You could possibly see your friends perform as I have in past years, or simply go to see the work that these talented dancers have put in to make this performance as magical as it can possibly be.



A performer during the Sacramento Ballet's 2023 show of the Nutcracker.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DOWNTOWN SACRAMENTO BALLET

Christmas Lights

One of the easiest ways to enjoy the holiday season without breaking the bank is to look at Christmas lights. Now of course you could technically do this anywhere, but one of the best places to do it is in the Fab Forties. The time and effort put into these houses for the holiday season is absolutely FAB! Oftentimes families from this neighborhood give out hot chocolate and play music to people passing by watching the lights. Sometimes you'll even see carriage rides!

Theatre of Lights

Retelling "Twas the Night Before Christmas" on the rooftops of the Old Sacramento Waterfront, the Theatre of Lights is a remarkable performance that is perfect for everyone. Alongside the retelling is a dive back into the 1850's with stories of old pioneers.

Ice Skating

One of my favorite things to do during the holidays is to spend an hour or two going ice skating with my friends at the Downtown Sacramento Ice Skating Rink. The vibes and decorations downtown, in addition to memories that can be created, makes ice skating one of the best activities during the holiday season.



Downtown Sacramento Ice Skating Rink

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE DOWNTOWN SACRAMENTO ICE RINK

Q&A with Konrad Millard: The Nutcracker and More

BY MATILDA MYERS '27

It's that time of the year! Sacramento Ballet's annual performance of The Nutcracker is just around the corner, so don't forget to purchase your tickets if you want to participate in the Christmas tradition! Over Thanksgiving break, I was fortunate enough to interview high-school sophomore Konrad Millard, one of the talented dancers to be featured in the ballet. This is Millard's seventh year participating in the performance and is his first year playing the title role: the Nutcracker. The following Q&A concerns Millard's thoughts on this coveted role, and his experiences in rehearsal and beyond.

How would you describe your role in The Nutcracker? How does your character contribute to the plot of the ballet?

I'm playing the Nutcracker, who is the secondary protagonist and friend of Clara. The Nutcracker serves as Clara's companion throughout the ballet and helps her along her journey through the Land of Sweets. He's helpful, brave, and always enjoys a good adventure.

What's your favorite part of playing the Nutcracker?

My favorite part of playing the Nutcracker is getting to explore different facial expressions and conveying the story through gestures and dance. Mixing traditional ballet with expressive acting isn't something I get to pursue very often, as we usually only focus on technique in our classes.

However, this is also generally the hardest part, so it can be a little frustrating; juggling spacing, acting, timing, and technique all at one time is difficult, but I enjoy it nonetheless.

Do you ever find it difficult to balance rehearsals with your high school career?

Definitely. Now that we're about to hit December, I usually have upwards of 12 hours per week spent in the studio. And that also doesn't include regular ballet classes. It's sometimes hard to manage my academic load with all the rehearsing, especially with finals coming up, but at least it forces me to improve my time management skills!

What is it that you think sets ballet apart from other art forms?

What I think sets ballet apart from other art forms is its sophistication and traditional style. The refined nature of ballet makes it very beautiful and elegant while keeping the rigorousness of an average sport. The juxtaposition of ballet's polished exterior and its brutal interior is a very interesting experience for me.

Lastly, is there any advice you have for anyone who might be interested in trying to dance out for themselves?

For anyone interested in starting ballet, or any other kind of dance, just understand that when you begin it's not going to feel at all natural. It will take time before you get the

Q&A with Konrad Millard: The Nutcracker and More con't.

hang of it, but once you do, it's going to feel very rewarding.

It's also important not to compare yourself to others. Although it's tempting to do so, just focus on yourself. I still struggle with this one myself, but it always helps me to remember how everyone goes at their own pace. One person's weaknesses could be your strengths, and vice versa, so I think it's important to be humble but not overly critical of yourself.

Any last thoughts?

For those reading, if you're free, come enjoy the show! We'll be performing from the 13th to the 22nd, so see how our hard work pays off, and don't miss out!

Holiday Traditions Around The World

BY KATIE KOO '27

The temperatures beginning to drop this winter and the rainy soothing weather marks the start of many different celebrations of cultural traditions like Diwali, Las Posadas, Christmas, Lunar New Year, and many others. Allow this to be your guide to exploring the many different holiday traditions around the world.

Starting with the holiday known as Diwali celebrated over five days with each day having its own significance and traditions, Junior Yogja Singla said, "We always host a huge Diwali party for family and friends where we get to dance and dress up in traditional clothing." Diwali is a Hindu holiday known as the festival of lights but is also celebrated in other Indian religions such as Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. The five days Diwali is celebrated are known as Dhanteras, Narak Chaturdashi, Diwali,

Govardhan Puja, and Bhai Dooj. Throughout these five days, the common themes are the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. This festival brings families together and is a time for joy, gratitude, and celebration.

Going into December, the celebrations of Las Posadas and Christmas are very widely known and celebrated holidays. Las Posadas is a traditional Mexican celebration that takes place from December 16th to December 24th. It commemorates the journey of Mary and Joseph as they search for a place to stay in Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus. "La Familia has taken the privilege to host the first Posada at St. Francis and we are filled with excitement as we prepare to show our Troubies a taste of the beautiful Mexican culture during the Christmas season," Junior Yaqueline Zavala,

Holiday Traditions Around The World con't.

co-president of La Familia, said. "It is important for us to incorporate these traditions into our community at SF because for us Hispanics these traditions are a part of who we are." Christmas, celebrated December 25th, marks the birth of Jesus Christ. This widely known holiday is celebrated with many people enjoying festive meals, singing Christmas carols, and participating in charitable activities. The figure of Santa Claus, who brings gifts to children, is also a central part of the celebration. Overall, Christmas is a time of joy, reflection, and togetherness, embodying the spirit of love and generosity that Jesus brought to the world.



A family enjoying Posada festivities with a pinata (just without the blindfold!).

PHOTO COURTESY OF CBS NEWS

Moving on from the month of December and its slam-packed holiday schedule, the very traditional holiday of Lunar New Year is celebrated typically between late January and mid-February. Lunar New Year marks the beginning of a new year based on the lunar calendar. Sophomore Yimo Huang said, "My favorite tradition is where our entire

group makes dumplings from scratch together and we like to put a peanut in a few of them, and later when we eat, whoever eats a dumpling with a peanut wins an extra 20 dollars!" Lunar New Year, also known as Chinese New Year, Têt, or Sella, is celebrated with family gatherings, the cleaning of homes to sweep away bad luck, decorations of red lanterns and couplets, and red envelopes filled with money to children for good fortune.

Whether it's the vibrant festivities of Diwali, the cultural celebrations of Las Posadas, the joy of Christmas parties, or many other beautiful holidays, each tradition brings its unique flavor to this jolly season.



The dragon, an iconic symbol of Lunar New Year, displayed as a statue at a Lunar New Year parade.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GETTY IMAGES

2024 Pop Culture Recap

BY HAWA SHETAB '28

Each year is unique with its own set of cultural norms that silently come and go, but in 2024 there was diversity mixed with nostalgia and innovation, where old trends were given new life making this one of the most memorable years. From the resurfacing of Y2K- fashion to the sounds of artists like Sabrina Carpenter, the year was shaped by a blend of past influences and new trends. TikTok shaped so much from music to wellness, while pop culture was alive with unexpected moments—from rumors of Frank Ocean's return to dance challenges that took over the internet. Whether in fashion, music or entertainment, 2024 was a year of reinvention, reinforcing the unique footprint left behind.

Trends: Fashion, and Pop Culture

2024 has been a revolutionary year in many aspects, fashion trends being one of them. The "Brat Summer" aesthetic, inspired by the early 2000s and Charli XCX's album *Apple*, embraced bright, bold colors, chunky jewelry and oversized accessories. Cheetah print also made a major comeback, a tribute to '90s and Y2K fashion, showing up not only in clothing but also on accessories. This trend was part of a shift toward bold patterns and oversized clothes that took over the minimalist aesthetics of previous years, which I love to see more of! On the contrary, the "clean girl" aesthetic also rose to popularity, featuring trends like slicked-back buns, plain clothing, and gold jewelry. Key pieces in all of fashion this year included oversized blazers, chunky boots, chunky jewelry, baggy pants, low-rise jeans, bows, jorts and camo. Meanwhile, wellness trends saw the rise of the Stanley cup, the "clean girl" aesthetic and vanilla-scented items.

Food trends have been nothing short of phenomenal, with many creative ideas emerging. Chocolate-covered strawberries gained popularity early on in the year after a viral TikTok video was posted. Other viral foods included Buldak Ramen, Raising Cane's, seafood boils, Crumbl Cookies, Chipotle, Wingstop, Tanghulu, Dubai chocolate, cucumber salad, and Hwachae.

Music: Hits and Iconic Artists

2024 was filled with new releases, viral songs and breakthrough artists. Chappell Roan emerged as an upcoming star and quickly captured the attention of fans and critics. Sabrina Carpenter was another standout artist. With the release of her new album, Sabrina kept her place as a major figure in the music scene. Songs like "Espresso" went viral on TikTok, showcasing her talent across different genres. Tyler, The Creator continued to release music in 2024. His latest album was a mix of jazz, rap, and experimental sounds. Tyler's impact on both music and fashion remained strong, with his influence evident in the streetwear styles that dominated TikTok. Tyler, The Creator's *Chromakopia* continued to be a fan favorite, while other tracks like "Million Dollar Baby" and "Tell Your Girlfriend" became soundtrack staples of 2024. Olivia Rodrigo, Doja Cat, Tyla, SZA, and other major artists also made waves in 2024. One of the most anticipated musical moments was the rumored return of Frank Ocean. After years of silence since his 2016 album *Blonde*, posts and rumors had fans speculating that Frank was preparing new music.

Entertainment: Memorable Movies, TV Shows, and Viral Phenomena

2024 also delivered a number of fun moments in entertainment. Viral videos like

2024 Pop Culture Recap con't.

the chocolate covered strawberries and the Roblox game “Dress to Impress” took off. Meanwhile, the release of movies like *Mean Girls* sparked a lot of conversations online, with fans dissecting everything from plot twists to fashion choices. *Wicked*, starring Ariana Grande and Cynthia Erivo, was one of the major films this year. Other honorable mentions included *Smile 2*, *Inside Out 2*, *It Ends With Us*, *Beetlejuice* and *Despicable Me 4*.

One of the most memorable parts of the past year was two public feuds. In January, Nicki Minaj and Megan Thee Stallion had major beef after disses were thrown at Nicki's husband. Later, Kendrick Lamar and Drake had a lot of issues. Kendrick and

Drake had always had tension, starting over a decade ago. In 2012, Kendrick claimed he and other rappers were better than Drake, igniting the feud. In the song “First Person Shooter Mode,” the competition of the “Big Three” (Kendrick, Drake, and J Cole) got brought up, upsetting Kendrick. The feud became more popular in March, as Kendrick and Drake started to release diss tracks, the most popular being “Not Like Us.”

In conclusion, 2024 was a year of blending nostalgia and creativity. Whether through music, viral TikTok trends, or the resurgence of iconic fashion pieces, the year really showed how quickly trends can evolve and shape the way we reflect back on this era.

New Year's: Resolutions, Predictions, 2025

BY GEORGI WILLIAMS '28

From the annually anticipated ball drop in Times Square to the random New Year's parties in people's backyards, New Year's is a time for festivities and new beginnings. It's the year of the snake, and resolutions, predictions and upcoming events in 2025 are a big part of the celebrations for the coming year.

Resolutions are a huge part of New Year's with everyone thinking long and hard about what they want to do the following year. Some of the most common resolutions may be to lose weight or to get off social media. However, most of these plans become forgotten after simply a week or two of the new year. Some ways to create a good resolution is to make sure it's not too broad. A specific resolution such as “limit my instagram screentime to 2 hours each week”

is much easier to follow than just “get off of my phone.” Having a specific plan with realistic goals to reach bit by bit is also a great way to eventually reach a larger goal by the end of the year. Resolutions are no doubt one of the biggest parts of New Year's, which is why doing it right is the most important thing of all.

Predictions are fun and quirky, but can also be very misleading. Someone could look up “political state of the world predictions 2025” and get an article from a highly experienced professional explaining the future of Donald Trump's presidency, but then receive another article from someone in their basement writing “the aliens are coming and we are all going to die.” Not all predictions can be trusted, but it's always fun to look into some of those predictions for the new year such as the imminent trends in the fashion and social media world.

New Year's con't.

In 2024, leopard/cheetah print was dominating everyone's feeds, and many have skepticism for the appearance of tiger print and other animal prints as an ongoing trend into 2025. AI is also a popular conversation starter as it may be the future of the world. In other prediction news, social media influencer BENOFTHEWEEK posts an annual prediction video on YouTube for the coming year, even predicting the death of Queen Elizabeth. His prediction videos are perfect for anyone looking to have a laugh and think about what could be coming next year.

Upcoming events are a lot more reliable than predictions. They have a set date and time and are super fun to look forward to. One of the best things to look forward to are movie releases.

Some movies being released in 2025 are the live action Snow White, A Minecraft Movie, Captain America: Brave New World,

the live action How to Train Your Dragon, M3GAN 2.0 and so many more. The 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup in England and the 2025 Women's Cricket World Cup in India will also be a fun watch for any rugby and cricket fans.

Remember to get excited to slither into 2025 and make it the best year possible. A new year can be scary, that feeling of time passing becomes all the more stronger. However, having friends and family to take along the ride makes New Year's a more exciting time, anticipating what will happen next and going with the flow of the future.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WALLACE



Holiday Movie Hits

BY SANA SARKARI '28

Deck the Halls: A Heartwarming Holiday Comedy

During the holiday season, there's nothing better than cozying up near the fireplace with a warm drink, and turning on a classic Christmas movie.

The 2006 movie, *Deck the Halls*, has become a loved holiday classic that demonstrates the spirit of Christmas through humor and competition. Starring Danny Devito and Matthew Broderick, the movie perfectly captures the holidays.

Set in the suburban town of Treegap, the comedic storyline follows Steve Finch (played by Matthew Broderick), a man who takes pride in his community's holiday traditions. However, his Christmas routine is disrupted when Buddy Hall (played by Danny Devito) moves in. Buddy wants to have a house that can be seen from space with how bright it is, and he is determined to outshine his neighbor and goes to extreme lengths to do so with his funny antics.

Visually, with its snowy scenery and twinkling lights, the movie gives off the ultimate cozy vibe. The festive decorations, music and atmosphere create a mood that will leave you extremely excited for the upcoming holidays.

In conclusion, *Deck the Halls* is a movie full of laughter, and it reminds us true holiday joy comes from the people we share it with.

Rating: ★★★☆☆ (3 out of 5)

A Christmas Prince: A Romantic Holiday Classic

If you're looking for a relatively newer, more romantic movie, *A Christmas Prince* is the perfect one. Released in 2017, *A Christmas Prince* quickly became a part of Netflix's staple of holiday movie marathons as it had two sequels made.

This charming romantic comedy takes place in the kingdom of Aldovia where the protagonist, a young journalist Amber Moore (played by Rose McIver), is assigned to cover a royal story that could potentially change her life.

Determined to prove herself a worthy reporter, Amber travels to look into "the mystery prince" Richard, (played by Ben Lamb) who is set to ascend the throne after his father's death. As the film goes on, Amber discovers not only the prince's true personality but also the pressure he faces preparing to take on royal responsibilities.

The film blends fairy-tale elements with romance, featuring cinematography that captures the beauty of winter. It explores themes of responsibility, love and self-discovery, making it resonate with viewers looking for something more than just a regular holiday rom-com.

In short, *A Christmas Prince* is the perfect movie for a cozy night in. Its storyline and setting make it a perfect choice for a night in. Whether you're a fan of holiday romance, or simply a cute story, *A Christmas Prince* has become a new favorite that captures the spirit of the season.

Rating: ★★★★★ (5 out of 5 stars)

Home Alone: A Case Study

BY DELANEY MCGAHAN '28

With its delicate combination of family, comedy, and Christmas magic, the first two Home Alone movies went down in cinema history as staple films for the holiday season. Released in 1990 and 1992, *Home Alone* and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* details the adventures of Kevin McAllister, played by Macaulay Culkin, after he gets separated from his family when they (try) to take a Christmas vacation. Harry and Marv, played by Joe Pesci and Daniel Stern, known as the Wet Bandits and in the second movie the Sticky Bandits, are burglars whose plans are outsmarted by Kevin with his clever boobytraps. The first two are great movies, but what exactly made them the classics they are today and why don't the rest of them live up to the first two?

The premise of the first Home Alone is uniquely charming, which is part of what makes the movie so entertaining. Common Christmas movie tropes are Santa Claus, magic, elves, etc. However, albeit far-fetched, Home Alone is grounded in some degree of reality. Rather than it being a literal fantasy with flying sleds and Santa workshop magic, it's a fantasy for Kevin, and by extension, all the kids watching. Being able to stay home alone is one of the privileges of being an adult. As Kevin essentially gets to do whatever he wants without immediate repercussions, the children watching can relate to him on a different level. In addition, you cannot talk about Home Alone without talking about the comedy, which can mainly be attributed to Kevin and the Wet Bandits. Although Kevin does things that are expected of a child left home alone, like watching a movie and eating too many treats for his own good,

the actions such as pretending to be an adult for a day add another layer of comedy. Harry being the "planner" and Marv being the "dumber" one, as well as the chemistry between the two actors, goes to craft a hilarious dynamic that's entertaining to watch.

Home Alone 2: Lost in New York is different enough from the first one to be regarded as its own movie, but it's still completely on brand with what you'd expect from watching a Home Alone movie. The audience gets a troublemaking but innocent Kevin, the two hilarious bandits, and the iconic climax of the booby-trapped house (in this case, it was his Uncle Rob's). Although the setting is far bigger, going from a small town to New York City, it doesn't feel like a curveball because NYC is famous for its holiday celebrations. It also reinforces the first movie's trope of a wide-eyed child, except this time he's in a big city rather than his home. A lot of the same jokes make a return in the second movie, but the context is changed so that it doesn't feel like a cheap rehash of the past. A prime example of this is the gag where Kevin pauses and plays a movie to make it seem like an adult is speaking. The essence of the joke is enough to remind people of the first movie, but it's different enough to get a real genuine laugh out of the audience, which is the main reason why the second movie is good in general. It's a near-perfect balance of fan service with a fresh take on the premise, thus making Home Alone 2 just as much of a classic as the first one.

Keeping this in mind, this is why Home Alone 3 fails as a follow-up and subsequently kills any other Home Alone movies.

Home Alone: A Case Study con't.

Originally, the directors wrote a script with Kevin McAllister in it as a teenager and the Wet Bandits.

However, Macauley Culkin decided not to reprise his role because he wanted to pursue other parts. Another idea for the script was for Kevin's cousin Fuller to be the new protagonist, but Kieran Culkin didn't think he could compare with his brother's iconic performance. Eventually, they settled on getting entirely new characters. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but the issue comes when the plot is detached from the rest of the franchise. When watching a Home Alone movie, the expectation is that a kid is going to be lost/left behind, get into wacky shenanigans, and be reunited with his family.

The third hook is that international criminals are trying to steal a top-secret computer chip from a toy car. It's also worth mentioning that it just doesn't feel like a Christmas movie. Sure, it takes place during the festive season, but the main themes of family, holiday magic,

and childlike innocence are missing from the film. While there are hints of them throughout the film, they aren't the main focus of it, which is a surprise as it's what is presumed when watching a Christmas movie. This is especially disappointing when those themes are at the core of the first two films. Consequently, Home Alone 3 marked the start of the downhill of Home Alone as a whole, killing all expectations for any future installments (even if they had turned out to be good).



Home Alone movie poster.
PHOTO COURTESY OF DISNEY+

Advice for Fall Finals

BY ADA FRUIN '27

With performances, sports, and the upcoming holidays, finals can be put on the back-burner until all of the sudden, you realize you have six tests in the next week. To reduce this stress, use these helpful tips!

Start Studying Early

If you begin incorporating a little bit of studying into your daily routine several weeks before finals, you will not have to review as much material from the very beginning of the semester. When you avoid cramming, you can thoroughly review every topic, and be ready for whatever comes your way.

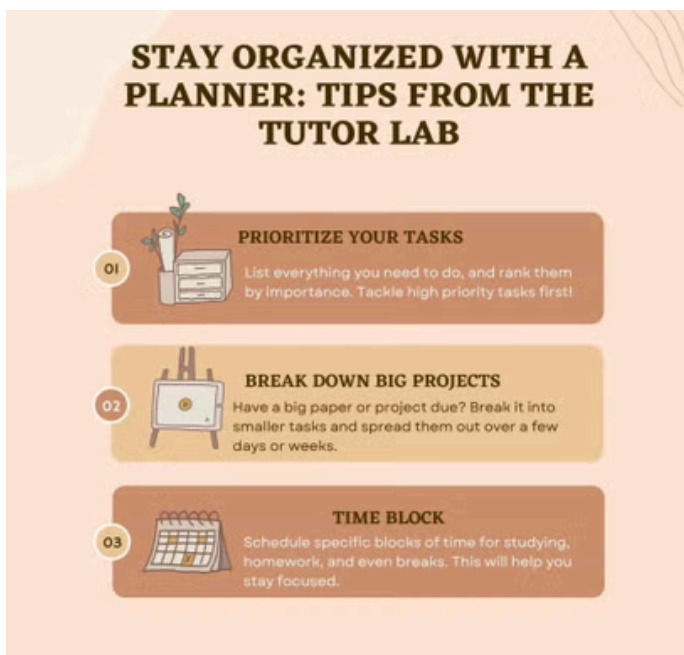
Use Different Studying Methods

Flashcards are a great way to practice active recall, and when you create them, you associate words and pictures with concepts. Practice tests help you identify what you really need to study once you do not have the support of your notes. Explaining a topic to a friend or pet can also be beneficial because teaching a concept requires an extra level of understanding.

Advice for Fall Finals con't.

Ask Questions

Is there a topic that you are still confused about? A type of question you always get wrong? The best way to go into finals season is to be confident with every skill you are required to know. Don't be afraid to reach out to a teacher! If you still need additional help, make sure to make an appointment at our Peer Tutor Lab.



Some advice from our wonderful Peer Tutoring team!

PHOTO COURTESY OF ST. FRANCIS HIGH SCHOOL

Take breaks

While it may seem counterintuitive to stop studying while you are in a long study session, taking purposeful breaks can actually increase your understanding by letting your brain refresh and avoiding fatigue. Some of the best things you can do during your purposeful study break are doing some light exercise, such as taking a walk, preparing a nutritious meal, or listening to some music.

The pomodoro study method helps you integrate these breaks into your routine. While using the pomodoro method, you may study for 25 minutes, then take a five minute break. After repeating this a couple of times, you can take a longer break for 30 minutes.

The Day of the Test

It may be tempting to study all night before your morning final, this will only make you tired the next day. Since being overly tired will actually make it harder for you to focus during the test, try your best to prioritize your sleep the night before. Eating breakfast will help prevent having a blood sugar crash during the test. Taking some time to eat a granola bar or some yogurt could have a huge positive impact on your test performance.

Remember to stay confident and not stress. You've been working hard all semester, so finish strong!

Q&A with Ms. Villanueva

BY DELANEY MCGAHAN '28

Mrs. Stephanie Villanueva is the Director of Campus Ministry here at St. Francis. I asked her to answer these questions with hopes that students will better understand what she does for our SF community.

What is your job? I'm the Director of Campus Ministry.

How long have you been working at St. Francis? I began in August 2003, and Mrs. McDonald, Dean Cost, Mrs. Maier (in HR), and I all started the same year.

What do you appreciate about the SF community? I appreciate the kindness and generosity of the SF community. I've both witnessed it and experienced it personally. The ease with which my colleagues have supported me over the years has gotten me through some difficult times. My best friends and closest confidants have become part of my life because of St. Francis.

Why do you think campus ministry is important? Campus Ministry is for everyone! It's where we get to know each other as people- you can bring your whole self. While boundaries must be respected, we get to see one another in terms of life experiences, shared interests, and curiosities about one another's faith journey. We don't have to compete; we can simply enjoy what each person brings and appreciate one another for how we uniquely contribute to the SF community.

How can a student get involved in campus ministry? Everyone already is! You are already involved by

attending a school-wide liturgy or doing Christian Service hours. Beyond that, students can register for their class retreat, attend their family Mass, take the Ministry Leadership class, or apply as a Big Sister, Retreat Team Member, CSL, or Kairos leader. Students who are fully initiated Catholics can also volunteer to be Lectors, Altar Servers, or Eucharistic Ministers.

What do you hope the students gain from fulfilling their Christian service hours? I hope they understand that life is complex and people cannot be put into boxes that deem them important, good, or worthy. By meeting people where they are, we understand that everyone has something to offer and that needing a little help does not negate our dignity or self-worth. To be in a position of giving or serving is a privilege we quickly take for granted. But, if we stop to reflect on our own lives, we can see the many ways we benefit each day from the service and kindness of others.

What advice do you have for someone struggling to complete their service hours? First, consider what you enjoy or the places you're already connected to. If you like the arts or sports, there are many nonprofit organizations in need of volunteers. See if they need extra volunteers if you're active in your faith community. Perhaps volunteer as a tutor at your old school if you're considering being a teacher. Start in a place that makes you happy or where you will be a joyful, engaged volunteer. If all else fails, ask a friend or stop by Campus Ministry.

Q&A with Ms. Villanueva con't.

Is there anything else you would like Troubies to know? St. Francis will always be what you make it. You'll meet some fantastic people if you are involved and try new things.

If you ask for help and maintain communication with your teacher or counselor, you'll get the support you seek. If you go on a retreat or do service with an open mind and heart, you will see the wonderful people and blessings in your life.

Christmas Recipe

BY DANIELLE PAYANT '26

As we celebrate the holiday season, there is no better time to bake sweet treats than while we're on break. This recipe is a super fun and easy way to bring some holiday cheer to friends and family, no matter your skill level. Even better, with a few small modifications, these delicious treats can be made totally gluten-free for those of us who have dietary restrictions. If you leave one out for Santa, I heard there might be an extra present under the tree! Happy Baking!

Ingredients for the Sugar Cookie Fudge:

- 1 (14-oz.) can sweetened condensed milk
- 2 1/4 c. white chocolate chips
- 1 1/2 c. sugar cookie mix*
- 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1/4 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 1/2 c. crushed sugar or shortbread cookies (4-oz.)*
- 1/2 c. confetti sprinkles, divided
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract

*Substitute your favorite gluten-free sugar cookie mix to have the same delicious results.

Baking Instructions

Before preparing the fudge, by spraying a nine-inch square baking dish with nonstick cooking spray.

Baking Instructions con't

In a medium saucepan, heat the sweetened condensed milk over medium-high heat until hot, stirring rapidly to prevent scorching. Add the white chocolate chips and stir until melted, two to three minutes. Stir in the cookie mix, butter, and salt until smooth; remove the mixture from heat. After letting the mixture cool slightly, fold in the cookies, 1/4 cup plus two tablespoons of sprinkles, and vanilla.

Gently pour the fudge mixture into the prepared pan, smoothing the top. Top with the remaining sprinkles and any other desired toppings. Allow the fudge to set completely in the fridge before slicing. Share with friends and family and enjoy!



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE
PIONEER WOMAN

A Christmas Comic Strip

BY DOTTIE KROPP '28



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